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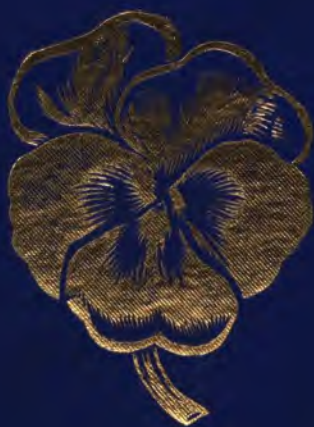
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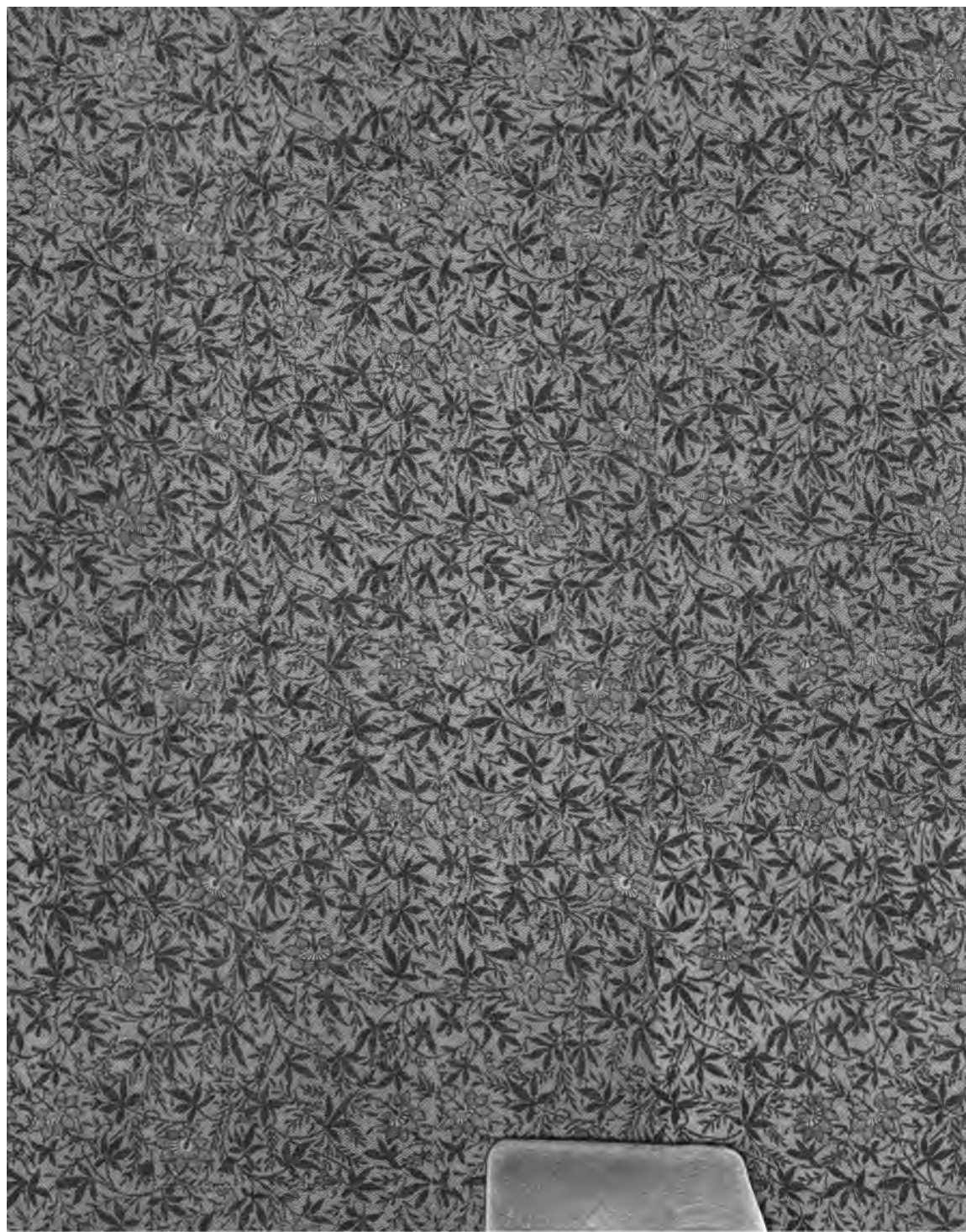
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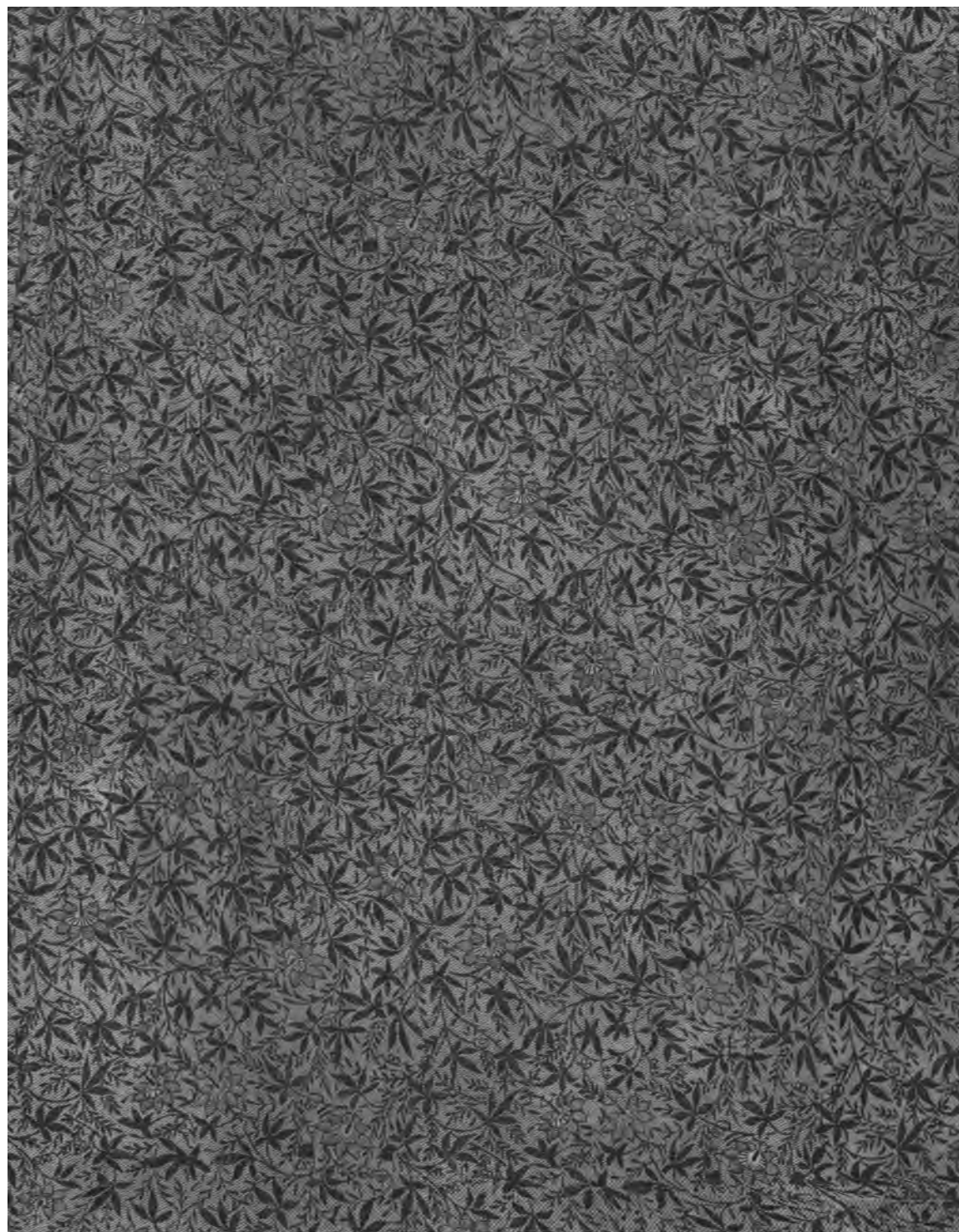
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and the Rabbits.







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# Heartsease and the Rabbits.









Leaving Fairyland.

*Frontispiece.*

# Heartsease & the Rabbits.

## A Fairytale

of our own time

by

The author of *The Cradle of the Blue Nile.*

with forty four illustrations

by

D. Y.



London :

HENRY SOTHERAN & CO., 36, PICCADILLY,

1882.

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To  
My Nephews & Nieces

Geraldine



Claude



Memi



Phyllis



St Pierre



Isie

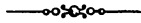


& George.





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# Heartsease and the Rabbits.

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## CHAPTER I.



### HEARTSEASE.

Heartsease was a little white fairy.

Her eyes were blue as the lobelia's  
leaf,  
Her pretty lips with rosebuds  
might compare ;  
More bright than corn when gar-  
nered in the sheaf,  
Was the rich yellow of her golden  
hair ;  
Her skin, transparent as her brow  
was fair,  
Her manner gentle, sweet, and  
yet demure,  
You felt that angels all her thoughts  
might share,  
Her soul so lofty, and her spirit  
pure.

She was such a pale, fragile, diaphanous little thing, that, had you seen the glimmer of her silver wings as she fluttered

through the woods on a summer night, you would have taken her for a stray moonbeam that had wandered away from her sisters and got lost, nor ever guessed that you had met little Heartsease, who wished well to every living being, and would be sure to send you *such* soft slumbers, and *such* golden dreams, that you would wake up in the morning as happy as a Skylark.

For, though Heartsease was so small, hardly higher than a lily of the valley when she stood on tip-toe, yet she had a *very* big heart ; so big, indeed, that it could take in the whole wide world and yet have room to spare ; and she loved every one of God's creatures dearly, for the sake of Him who made them.

Of course she had her preferences, and liked better to talk to the beautiful Butterflies than to the old grey Spiders with their hooky claws, and wicked little eyes in the middle of their backs ; but she knew that if the Spiders were ugly, they had been made so for some wise purpose, and she was kind to all about her. And truly, the Spiders repaid her, for they had seen a great deal of life as they sat quietly spinning their webs, and Heartsease had to admit that their conversation was often more instructive than that of the foolish Butterflies, who were always asking her to tell them the colour of the flower that suited their complexions best.

Then there was no limit to the number of her friends among

the Hares and the Rabbits, and the Bees and the Robin-redbreasts, and the Swallows—great travellers these, who brought her news from abroad—and even the old grey Snails, whom she visited every week with nice pieces of fresh lettuce-leaf, for they were her pensioners, and everybody knows that a respectable Snail enjoys her lettuce-leaf as much as an old woman does her cup of tea ; and the funniest thing was that whenever Heartsease went to visit the Snails, she always found them at home !

Heartsease lived in a hole in an oak in Featherbell Park ; such a dainty little chamber ! all hung round with the most beautiful gossamer lace spun by her friends the Spiders. The chairs and cushions were covered with the softest emerald-moss velvet, and the floor was of polished oak, which her busy neighbours the Bees had waxed to such a pitch that you could see yourself in it as in a mirror.

A clear bubbling brook ran past the foot of Heartsease's oak, full of great speckled Trout, who regarded Heartsease as their protectress, for she had the young Trout up in classes, and taught them how to know a real fly from a ' Red-spinner ' or a ' Coch-y-bondhu,' and if a fisherman came that way, he would wonder why the fish, when he threw his fly on the water, always wagged their tails and made off to the shelter of the green sedges.

There was an island formed by the root of an old poplar in

the middle of the brook, on which grew a beautiful forest of king fern ; and here, in the warm summer weather, Heartsease used to sit in the cool shade of the overhanging fronds and

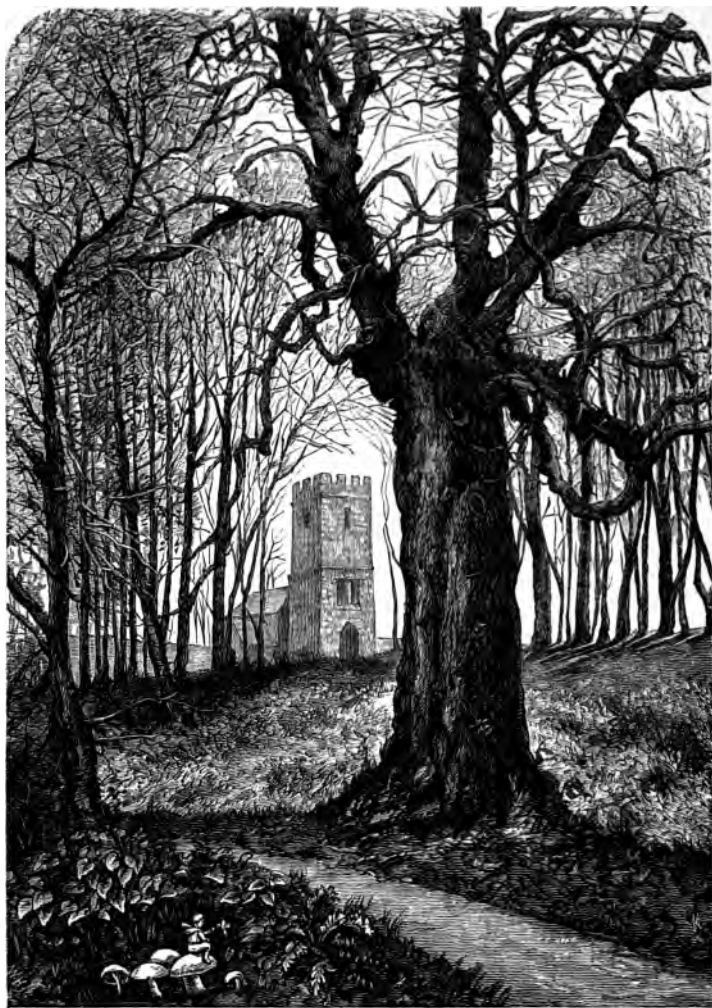


teach a singing class of young birds, whom she also instructed in the difficult art of weaving their nests. It would have gone hard with the boldest Gnome had he attempted to tease little Heartsease, for wherever she went hundreds of loving eyes watched her from

branch and blade, bramble and brook, ready to protect their darling Fairy.

Heartsease did not care for the society of the Gnomes, she thought they were so thoughtless and cruel ; and whenever she caught one tickling the feelers of her rheumatic old Snails, or upsetting a fat, plethoric Beetle hurrying on his way





The Gnome's Oak.

to business, she would talk to him *so* beautifully, and with such a glorious light in her soft blue eyes, that he would slink away to the toadstool where he lived, quite ashamed of himself, and become a changed Gnome from that time forth.



Snip-Snap  
 Was a little chap,  
 A Gnome of low degree,  
 And he lived  
 Under a toadstool  
 By the roots of an old oak tree.  
 He loved to tease  
 The Snails and Frogs,  
 Which he call'd a merry spree,  
 And the village boys  
 To the deepest bogs  
 He would lure with impish glee.  
 One day he met a Fairy,  
 Oh, how fair was she !  
 She spoke of Him who  
 Succours the weak,  
 And makes the strong to flee.

Snip-Snap  
 Was a little chap,  
 But his heart was not half bad,





Hurlingham's Pool.

## CHAPTER II.



IN SOCIETY.

**I**n this particular evening Heartsease was in a pleasant flutter of expectation, for her friend Mrs. Bunnie was going to give a great Rabbits' ball, to bring out her beautiful daughter Flossy, at her country house known as 'The Burrow,' on Dingle Farm. Everybody was to be invited; and, as the first rays of the autumn moon were already glistening on the heather-capped tors of the glen, Heartsease was taking a last look at her beautiful face in the clear depths of her brook before starting. The inspection was apparently satisfactory, for with a bright smile she unfolded her delicate wings, and away she flew like a gleam of silver light—

Flitting, tripping,  
Grass leaves tipping,  
Onward little Heartsease sped.  
Every Daisy  
'Neath her footstep  
Gently bends its blushing head ;  
Shining Beetles,  
Fat and lazy,  
Watch her flight with loving eye ;  
Daddy Long-legs,  
Lean and crazy,  
Dance around her in the sky.

Just as the hour of nine pealed softly from the distant village spire, she reached the Burrow, and then what a chorus of greetings met her ! Mrs. Bunnie hurried up to kiss her, and all the company crowded round to welcome their favourite. It was a very large gathering. There were Mr. and Mrs. Coniah, of Corny Hollow, who belonged to a most respectable family, and the five Master Coniahs, commonly called by their intimates, Huz, Buz, Fuz, Jock, and Grip ; they were very lively young gentlemen, who danced all the dances, and made facetious remarks which threw their partners into fits of laughter. Only Huz was of a more serious disposition, and the acute Mrs. Magpie declared in *strict* confidence, and not to be repeated, to two dozen of her most intimate friends, that she believed he was madly in love with the beautiful Miss Flossy Bunnie, for he never took his eyes off her the whole evening. He was a fine young fellow, with tender yet courageous black eyes, and, unlike his

brothers, was attired in a white choker and an evening suit of the correctest sable, a fashion rarely followed by Rabbits, even of distinguished position, grey and brown being their favourite colours, as less likely to attract the attention of the too curious passer-by.

Of course, Miss Flossy Bunnie was the belle of the ball; she was robed in snowy white, which added to the depth and lustre of her beautiful soft dark eyes. Then there were the Lloyd Bunnies, and the Coniah ap Lloyd ap Cheeses, Welsh Rabbits; and the Grand Rabbi, a learned gentleman, very grey, and getting rather bald about the crown, who had just completed his great work, in nine octavo volumes, on the Rabbit-warrens of ancient Nineveh: 'which everybody thought so much of, you know,' though few people had had the courage to read it. He was surrounded by an admiring circle of elderly young lady Blue Rabbits, who were listening with rapt attention to his learned dissertation on the antediluvian toadstools of Great Britain.

He remarked that there were several whose sites had not yet been accounted for, and that in his next great work he intended to proclaim to the world that the very spot on which their kind host and hostess—here he bowed politely to Mr. and Mrs. Bunnie and wiped his spectacles—had now assembled them, was the site of one of these primeval temples. For, as he was pleased to observe, it *might* have been the site, and,

as it was necessary for the sake of science that the seven which were lost should be placed *somewhere*, he saw no reason why one of them should not be placed there ; in fact, the more



he thought of it, the more he felt convinced that this was the identical spot, an opinion which he supported with many erudite arguments—not the least strong of which was that his rival, Professor Babbi, Fellow of the Royal Society of Rabbits, whom he parenthetically re-

marked was an ignorant fellow, had emphatically declared that this was *not* the site in question, but a comparatively modern mole-hill, little more than ten thousand years old, and this was quite enough to convince him that it *was* the spot, and the world should know his opinion, etc., etc.

Two other important, if not very welcome, guests, were Mr. Weasel, the celebrated reporter of the *United Vermin Gazette*, and his editor, Mr. Rat.

The former was a red-haired little gentleman, with short broad ears, and small beady black eyes, which, added to a bristling moustache and a set of very sharp white teeth, gave him a somewhat sinister aspect ; he appeared in a snowy white waistcoat, and had a noiseless, restless way of moving about which was very uncomfortable, for he was always turning up at your elbow when you least expected to see him, and then he gene-



rally patted you on the back, and laid his finger beside his nose in a waggish manner, as much as to say ' *I've* found you out ! ' He declared himself to be the farmers' friend, but those who had young lambs in their charge were very shy about receiving his visits, and rumour said they had good reason to be so.

You may be quite sure very little escaped Mr. Weasel's two beady black eyes.

Mr. Rat, his literary head, had also a bristling moustache, but his forehead was even more retreating, and he had besides



four long projecting teeth, which his moustache could not cover ; he spoke in short, snapping sentences, and was constantly saying disagreeable things that made poor little Heartsease tremble with fear and repugnance. He used to hint darkly at secret brotherhoods, numbered

by millions, in the subterranean passages of the great cities, that were only waiting for his signal to rise in their hundreds of thousands and overwhelm society.

‘We are sleeping on a volcano,’ he would say, ‘and a day will come when there shall be no distinction of classes, and we shall all be united in one great confederation of vermin.’

And then was not Mr. Rat going to make changes ! The clumsy and antiquated fabric of Church and State would soon crumble before *his* legions ; already his friends were eating away at its foundations.

‘Ha ! ha ! you thought you were secure in your strength, but *he* could tell you that at that moment the very WOOLSACK

WAS TREMBLING before the attack of his confederates. They had forced their way into the House of Commons, and they would not be denied the House of Lords! People said that the landlord had no right to the land: it was very true; he upheld the doctrine: but he went further—if the landlord who had bought the land with his money, or his talents, or that of his ancestors, had no right to it, what right had the tenant who simply lived upon it and fattened? Yes, a day *would* come, and that soon, when the vermin of England would overthrow all obstacles and enjoy their ancient rights and possessions. He had friends in both Houses, and he could tell them, in confidence, that a Bill had already passed for the confederation of vermin. Would they be surprised to hear that even their haughty rival Sir Lepus Hare, who boasted of the Charters which had been conferred on him from the time of the Conquest, was now no better than he, Mr. Rat, and might be destroyed in all seasons at pleasure? (‘Hear, hear,’ from some of the younger Bunnies, who looked with envy on the aristocratic Hares.) ‘But he had more to tell them. They, his friends the Rabbits, he was glad to say, were included in the same measure, and would be no longer dependent on the caprice of a bloated aristocracy: in future they might be destroyed at will by the farmer and his labourer.’—Sensation among the elder Rabbits.—‘He was sorry if it should cause them any inconvenience, but it was a step in the right direc-



tion—the abolition of all distinctions of rank. But though he was constrained to accept for the present the aid of those members who, as he had said, were his friends, he had far different views for the future. Those members must not be surprised if, when, little by little, the vermin of England had gnawed away the barriers which now restrained them, they rose up in their might and devoured their half-hearted representatives.'

This speech, which fell like a thunderbolt in the midst of the party, caused a cold thrill of apprehension to go down the backs of the more responsible Rabbits, and the general festivity would have been permanently damped had not Mrs. Bunnie, like a clever hostess, at this moment announced supper.



## CHAPTER III.



### THE LOVERS' WALK.

the elder Rabbits were alternately discussing their neighbours, politics, and supper, the young people had not been slow to avail themselves of the opportunities for dancing afforded by the beautiful plot of greensward which formed the lawn of the Burrow, and the entrancing strains of Messrs. Lute and Tiny's celebrated Bullfinch band.

These amusements were diversified by the thrilling songs of Signor Bulbulini, a tenor of such exquisite pathos that rumour said he used to press a thorn against his breast to render his notes more touchingly pathetic. Indeed, the comic baritone

and bass, Messrs. Vanderbull and Vanderfrog, known as 'The Dutch Nightingales,' of the Royal Batrachian Opera, were so affected by his performance that big round tears rolled down their fat cheeks, and they declared that 'ze harmony, ze crescendo, ze vivace, ze tremolo, ze *all*, vibrated von ineffable chord in ze pit of zer bosom, and reminded zem of ze happy days ven zey vos von leetle Tadpoles, vis ze shining tails, listening to ze Nightingales !'

These two gentlemen were attired in canary-coloured coats, buff waistcoats, and speckled nankeen tights, and when, after recovering their composure, they smiled a humorous smile from ear to ear, that made Mr. Cheshire Cat, the comic amateur, feel quite envious, and prepared to sing their famous buffo duett :

' Oh ! vare, and oh ! vare is mine leetle vee frog,  
Oh ! vare, and oh ! vare can hee be ?  
Vith hees tail cut short, and hees legs cut long,  
Oh ! vare, and oh ! vare is hee ?'

everybody was ready to die with laughter ; only Mr. Rat remarked, in his nasty manner, that the pleasant rotundity of Mr. Vanderbull's figure reminded him that he had lately been in France, where they considered a fat Frog a great delicacy, and he had no doubt that, if possible, he would figure to even more advantage as a fricassee than a singer.

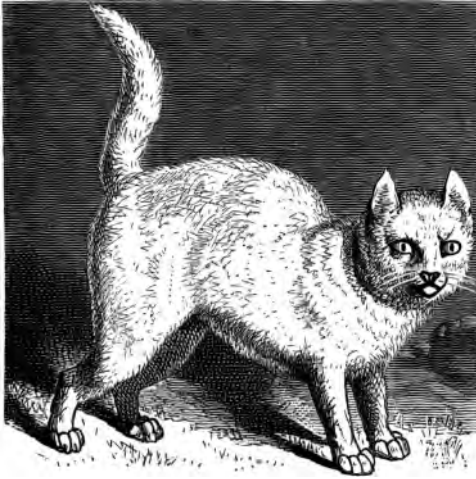
The peculiar twinkle in Mr. Rat's eyes as he paid this doubtful compliment so disconcerted the poor Dutchmen that



The Dutch Nightingales.



they grew nearly as pale as their waistcoats. But Mr. Cheshire Cat turned the tables by remarking sharply, as he twirled his moustachios, that he knew of a country, not so far off as France, where they eat Rats, and thought them uncommonly bad eating too. I promise you that the editor of the *United*



*Vermin Gazette* found the laugh turn against him at this sally, and thought it expedient to slink out of the way.

It was a lovely night ; the autumn was late this year, and, though September had already commenced, the air was soft

and balmy as in the middle of summer, while the silver rays of the moon, 'fair regent of the sky,' fell peacefully on many a field which had been merry that morning with the blithe song of the reaper, and where the golden sheaves of corn stood in rich profusion, awaiting the farmer's cart to gather them into the stack ; the heather and gorse were still in full bloom on the moor ; and the dark rocky edges of the tors shone in bold relief against the pale blue of the sky. Far below, a rushing stream found its way among the mysterious shadows of the glen, now bursting into the brilliant moonlight, now murmuring softly through the gloom,

here eddying furiously round the grey lichen-covered boulders, there breaking into a torrent of glistening spray as it fell over the weir, and again losing itself in the silent expanse of some deep pool ; singing as it went its endless song, sometimes softly, sometimes loudly, till it swept into the great ocean which lay beyond, with its bosom slowly heaving in the quiet moonlight like the tranquil breathing of a sleeper.



Two figures were moving down a wooded glade, stealing softly in and out of the chequered light that gleamed through the heavy foliage of the trees ; one was robed in pure white, the other, her darker and more stately companion, kept tenderly close to her side. They were Huz and Flossy, and

their hearts were full to overflowing with happiness and enjoyment of the exquisite beauty of the night ; long ago they had left the gay throng of dancers, and, in the friendly shelter of a cool fernery, Huz had found courage to pour into the willing ears of his beautiful companion that old old tale of love that is ever so new, that never loses its pathos or its interest, though it has been repeated, in almost the same words, since the world began, and the evening zephyrs were stealing through the garden of Eden.

The two lovers, as they wandered through clumps of tall, dark pine-trees, or out into the gleaming meadows beyond, felt as if none had ever loved before them, or would ever love again, so fondly as they did. They scarcely dared to speak, so much higher than words was the happiness that filled their hearts ; but, their love being true and humble, a feeling of unworthiness would occasionally oppress them, and they wondered why they two, of all the creatures in the world, should be the most happy that night, when so many others were suffering. Thus they wandered further and further, listening to the murmuring breezes among the sycamores, which sounded as if they were whispering to each other with bated breath some wondrous tale, and watching the flowers and grasses nodding softly in the sleepy heather-scented air.

At last Huz broke the eloquent silence.

‘ And do you really think your father and mother will let



me carry off their darling, and have me for a son?' he inquired anxiously.



To which she indignantly replied :

'Why should they not, when they all know and love you so well ?'

'Then you *do* love me a little ?' he asked, taking a lover's advantage of her last sentence ; and it was so pleasant to hear her pretty, earnest asseverations, that he required a great deal of reassuring

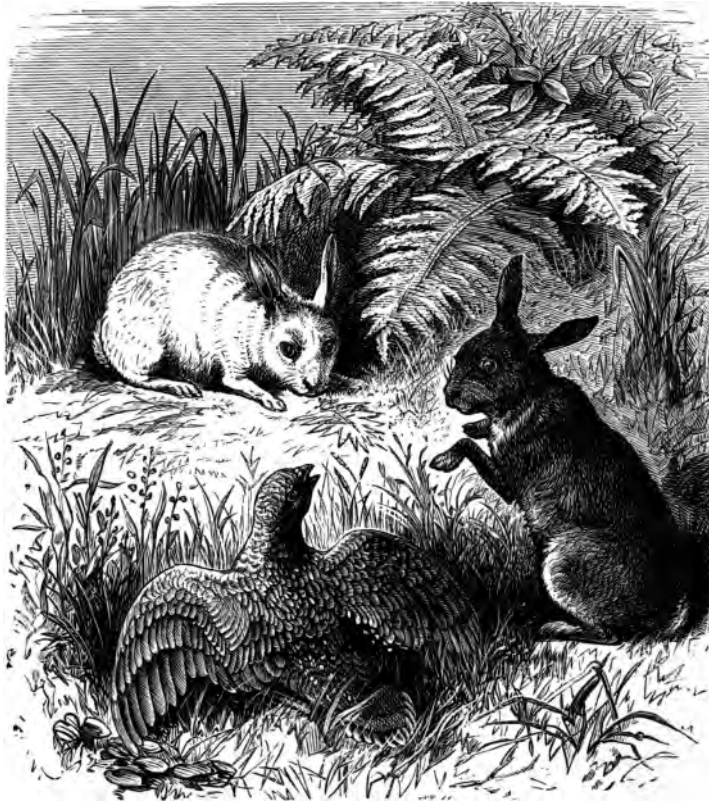
before he professed himself satisfied with her answers ; after which she demanded, turning diffident in her turn :

'Is it possible that Mrs. Coniah will accept such a poor, ugly daughter as a bride for her eldest son ?'

And Flossy had to be punished for this speech, though what the punishment was I do not know, as they were screened by the shadow of the trees, and had I been there I would not have looked ; but it could not have been *very* severe, for she emerged blushing and smiling and apparently reassured.

While they were thus communing sweetly with each other,

and drinking deeply of the cup of Rabbit-happiness, a pained and weird cry rang suddenly through the silent wood, which caused Flossy's heart to stand still with awe and fear. Huz was not slow to wind his protecting arm round the form of his



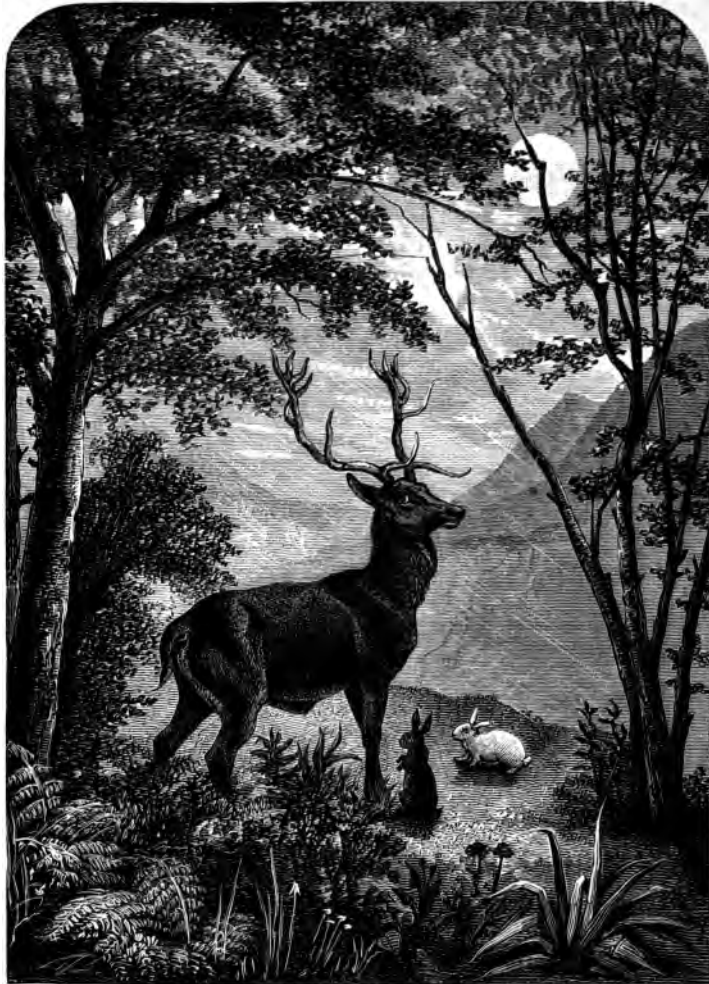
betrothed, but even his brave heart for a moment felt chilled by the ominous incident. Again the cry was repeated ; and, as hand-in-hand the lovers crept forward, they came upon a sight that might have touched the hardest heart.

Fluttering helplessly in the middle of the path lay a poor young Partridge, both her legs broken by the shot of some unskilful sportsman ; she was striving desperately to reach the shelter of a clump of fern, but had fallen panting and exhausted a few yards from it.

In a moment Flossy was beside the sufferer, trying to soothe her pain with many gentle caresses ; while Huz busied himself preparing a sheltered bed of leaves on which to place her. The contrast of their own happiness with the wretchedness of this poor bird touched them deeply ; for they knew that their own race had even more reason than hers to fear the thunder of the dreaded double-barrel, as it was whispered that Farmer Nokes begrudged them their share of the earth's fruits, and what little safety they enjoyed was wholly owing to the protection of Squire Longacre, who refused to permit their destruction. The Partridge, however, would not suffer Floss and Huz to remain with her.

'There is a storm coming,' she said, 'and you will be soaked through before you get home ; besides, I heard the whistle of Jim Sykes the poacher in the woods not long since, and even now he may be setting his snares. I was trying to get a place where he could not see me when you heard me cry out, but my husband is gone for Dr. Partridge, our great surgeon, and even now I think I can distinguish the beat of their returning wings. Go, kind friends, I beseech you, and be careful of Jim Sykes.'





The Royal Hart.

So, seeing that their presence only distressed her, they reluctantly bid her adieu, and began their homeward walk.

A great change had now come over the weather. The light of the moon was obscured by heavy masses of angry clouds ; the breeze no longer whispered among the sycamores, but blew in fierce blasts down the glen, scattering the leaves ruthlessly as it went : the soft song of the river was rapidly changing to an ominous roar, as a flood of dark brown water poured down with irresistible force from the moors, and Floss and Huz found many a dangerous rivulet, that had sprung into sudden birth, streaming across their path. Presently the storm overtook them, and heavy drops of rain and great round hailstones plashed through the foliage, drenching them to the skin ; suddenly a cracking among the boughs announced the approach of some great creature, and, as they stood still in silent apprehension, a large dark form loomed before them in the path, looking as if it were about to trample them underfoot.

It was a Royal Hart, with wide-spreading antlers, who, when he saw the terrified lovers, stopped a moment to bid them hurry on their way to shelter.

‘As for myself,’ he said, ‘I must brave the fury of the equinoctial gale, for this evening I discovered the harbours tracking my slots as I rested on the moor, and I know that to-morrow the huntsmen and the hounds will be out early on my track.’

Soon after they heard him splashing through the stream, which he hoped would baffle the cunning of his pursuers.



Many weird and strange sounds from the great grey night-owls, bats, and badgers, struck terror into the hearts of the truant pair as they cautiously crept home, fancying at every crackle in the boughs that Jim Sykes was on their track, with

his terrible dog Grab: the very sound of their footsteps frightened them, and it was long past midnight when, wet, weary, and covered with mud, they reached the Burrow. But not a sign of the gay scene they had left remained; the place was deserted, and the deep dints of Jim Sykes's heavy hob-nailed boots alone were there to show how the party had been dispersed.

Very silently did Floss and Huz make their way to the Warren, for they had a shrewd misgiving that they deserved a good scolding, and were not reassured when they found Mrs. Bunnie sitting up, with her hair in curl-papers. She vouchsafed only a very cold good-night to Huz, as he handed

in her daughter ; so, with a whispered promise to Floss that he would return in the morning and see her father, he went to his own home.

Flossy at once sought her chamber, where her mother soon followed her, and began to chide her for being out so late ; but when she noticed the draggled state of her beautiful white dress, and the spots of blood which the wounds of the Partridge had left on it, her anger gave way at once to anxiety, and she begged her daughter to tell her what had happened. Then Flossy, bursting into tears, hid her face in her mother's lap and told the story of her love, and the fond mother shed tears too, and thought of her own young, happy days of courtship, and you may be sure had nothing but sympathy to give her darling child.





## CHAPTER IV.

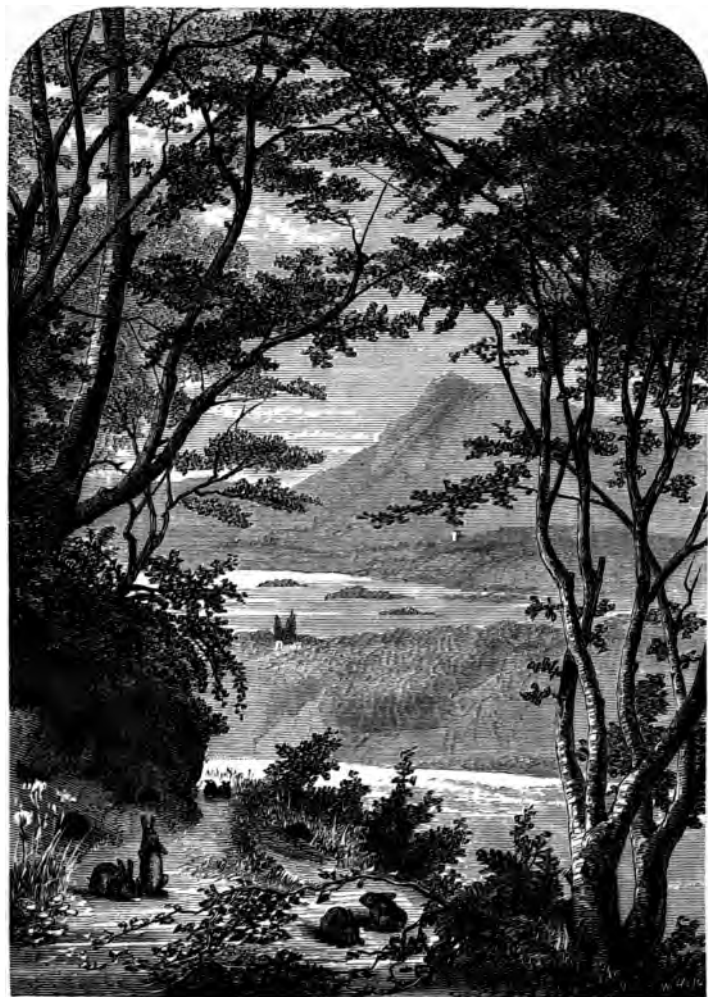
MR. AND MRS. BUNNIE AT  
HOME.



and Mrs. Bunnie were at home in their town residence at the Warren the morning after the events narrated in the last chapter, and were enjoying a *tête-à-tête* breakfast, for Flossy had not left her room.

Mr. Bunnie was a short, broad-nosed, rather stern husband, who always snorted when he was angry. To hear him talk, you would fancy he was constantly engaged on the most important business, and he had a great objection to being disturbed when he was reading the newspaper.

Mrs. Bunnie, his fair consort, was a stout, motherly person,



The Warren.



always bustling and fussing about, either in her own house or on some good-natured errand to her neighbours.

Indeed, Mr. Rat had once maliciously remarked that she was *all* bustle, as he watched her ample form retreating down the glade ; but Mr. Bunnie declared stoutly that ' Mrs. B. ' was the best wife in the world, and that you could not have too much of a good thing.

It was a peculiarity of Mr. Bunnie's that he was always very cross till he had had his breakfast, so his wife prudently abstained from broaching the subject that was on her mind till that meal was finished. At last she observed :

' Our Flossy is growing into a big girl now ; she created quite a sensation at the ball last night, and I suppose we shall soon have some one wanting to steal her from us. '

' Nonsense, ' said Mr. Bunny, as he took a few short turns up and down. ' Why, it seems only yesterday that she was a baby in arms. I hope, my dear, you have not been putting any such foolish ideas in her head ? '

' Not I, ' said Mrs. Bunnie deprecatingly ; ' but you know she is very handsome, ' and here she glanced at the reflection of her own comely face in a pool of water. ' We can't be surprised if somebody should fall in love with her. '

' Yes ; I think she takes after her father, ' remarked Mr. Bunnie complacently, as he stroked his broad nose ; ' but time enough for her to marry. I don't want to lose my little Flo

just yet,' and sitting down, he took up the *United Vermin Gazette*, evidently determined to put an end to the conversation.

'But, my dear,' said Mrs. Bunnie.

'What abominable rational stuff that fellow Rat does write!' said her husband impatiently, frowning at the newspaper.

Mrs. Bunnie stole up behind him and laid her hand on his shoulder.

'My dear,' she said, 'suppose there was some one who wanted to take care of our dear Flossy for life, and who loved her very much, and would be kind to her when we are both gone?'

'Why, what the——. You don't mean to say the girl has gone and made a fool of herself already!' said Mr. Bunnie, starting up and glancing uneasily at his wife.

'Well, my dear, you know the dangers that always surround us. We are here to-day, and gone—gone into the stewpan to-morrow,' she said tearfully; 'and we ought to be glad to see her future provided for.'

'Humph!' said Mr. Bunnie, snorting ominously. 'And who may this young gentleman be who is so anxious to do all this for us after we are gone into the stewpan, as you call it?'

'He is here,' she replied nervously, 'and very anxious to see you,' and she ran out and beckoned to Huz, who was not far off.

‘What, you!’ exclaimed Mr. Bunnie, looking at him rather blankly. ‘My dear, tell Flossy to come here immediately.’

As soon as she had arrived, he turned to Huz and said: ‘My dear fellow, I esteem and like you very much, I do indeed; but there is a reason, which I have told to no one, why what you wish is impossible. I am grieved at it. Flossy, my darling, don’t cry; what I am doing is for your own good, and you will not judge so hardly of your old father when you have heard what he has to say. Now, sit down, all of you, and listen to me:

### ‘The Legend of the Warren.

‘It was in the year one thousand and sixty-six that our ancestors first chose this place for their home. At that time there were no Rabbits in these woods; the oak forests, then as now, clothed the sides of the glen with their rich foliage, but the trees were of a more mighty growth, for they had never been decimated by the woodman’s axe, and the wealth of the lord of the soil consisted chiefly in great herds of Swine, which ranged freely through the woods, feeding themselves on the acorns.

‘Where our Warren now exists rose the spacious mansion of Earl Ethelwolf, and Dingle Farm was the site of a thriving hamlet tenanted by the Earl’s dependents; higher up the stream stood the grey monastery of St. Withold, in con-

venient proximity to a deep pool, famous for the size and quality of its Trout, the worthy monks having always a keen eye for a good Trout stream, as materially mitigating the rigour of their fast days, and affording them amusement in those moments which they spared to secular pursuits. Here, on a summer evening, the portly form of the good Abbot might frequently be seen deftly plying his rod and line, and many a finny giant of the pool fell a victim to his skill and cunning.

‘Peace and plenty reigned through the land, for the Lady Elwitha, the Earl’s wife, was the idol of all who knew her, and her gentle influence was ever ready to smooth the frown from her Lord’s forehead when his thralls angered him. In all her walks she had a constant companion, a beautiful snow-white Rabbit, a present from the Earl, which was named Bellitha, from the silver bell which she wore suspended to an azure silken cord around her neck.

‘Time wore on, and the Norman invaders swept through the land with fire and sword ; the Earl went to meet them with all his young men, and fell, fighting bravely, like a gallant knight, with his wounds in front, at Battle Bridge.

‘The azure cord round Bellitha’s neck was changed to sable, but, though overcome with grief, the Lady Elwitha never altered in her kindness towards her favourite. There was sore wailing among the women when they received the tidings

how their husbands, and brothers, and lovers had fallen beside their Lord, before the mail-clad legions of the Conqueror ; but, when one terrible day the frightened swineherds came rushing in to say that the foe was approaching, there



was no lack of courage among the old men and boys who alone remained in the village. Gathering hastily such arms as they could collect, they flew to the defence of their beloved Lady, and, if the fight was short, it was stubborn in the



extreme. The armour, discipline, and great personal bravery of the Normans made them victorious ; but, when at last they found themselves masters of the field, hardly a living soul remained of the once happy population of the village. The Lady Elwitha had died among the falling rafters of her house, and the Norman Baron, to blot the terrible scene from his memory, caused every cottage to be razed to the ground, and turned the place into a deer-forest.

‘Bellitha alone remained uninjured ; for, terrified at the sound of the fighting, she had escaped to the safe shelter of a hole in the rocks, and night after night she would wander round the remains of the Lady Elwitha’s favourite garden, mourning the absence of the kind mistress who was never to return.

‘You all know the feud that has existed from time immemorial between us and our haughty cousins the Hares, who look with disdain on our ‘homely and domestic habits, and that it is rarely we meet them without a fierce quarrel and bloodshed ensuing.

‘Now it happened that one evening as Bellitha sat pensively in the wood, she raised her eyes, and behold, there was a gigantic Hare crouching a short distance from her, his eyes dilated with anger, as he prepared to spring forward and destroy her.

‘Alone and helpless, she believed that her last moment had

come, and sat trembling with fear, unable to move, when, just as the hare raised himself to his full height, a voice of thunder cried: "Stand back, false hare, I am this damsel's champion, and will meet thee to the death in her defence!"



while a magnificent black rabbit, fully armed, sprang into the field and placed himself before her. The hare retreated a few paces, but only the better to brace himself for the encounter, for the laws of chivalry forbade him to decline the challenge.

‘ For a moment the two gazed at each other with flashing

eyes and distended nostrils, then, with the speed of lightning, they rushed together and met in the shock of battle. Bellitha looked on in an agony of fear and apprehension. Once she saw her unknown champion on the point of being overcome by his gigantic antagonist, and a piercing scream escaped from her ; this caused the hare for a second to turn his eyes in her direction, and gave the rabbit time to recover himself and gather his energies for a final effort ; the scale turned in his favour, and a few minutes later the hare rolled bleeding and disabled at his feet. Bellitha heard her champion's shout of triumph, and then she fainted.

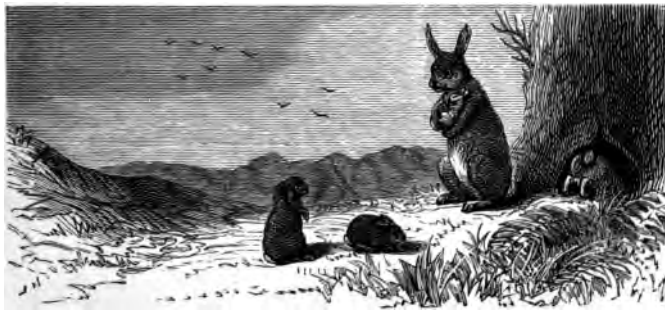
‘When she recovered consciousness, her defender was kneeling at her side ; the light of victory had faded from his eyes, and in its place was a softer and more subdued expression, which thrilled Bellitha with a new and exquisite sensation.

‘Then, in low, trembling accents, while the breeze was whispering softly among the leaves, and the sun was shedding its last mellow rays athwart the branches, the proud victor of the hour before told her how he in turn had been conquered by her beauty, and was a suppliant for mercy at her hands . . . .

‘The marriage was celebrated that night, and the fairy of the forest, an ancestress of our dear Heartsease, who presided at the ceremony, uttered this memorable prophecy :

“Eight hundred years and more shall dwell  
Your children in this fairy dell ;  
Nor food, nor home your kin shall lack,  
Till Black mates White, and White mates Black.’

‘Eight hundred years and more have passed, and the fairy’s prediction has been realised, for all that time, notwithstanding the changes that have swept over the land, our family has never ceased to thrive and prosper in this its ancient home. But it has ever been a rule among our elders, that on the rare occasions when there has been a Black and a White Rabbit in the Warren, they should never be allowed to mate. Judge, then, my children, if with this warning ringing in my ears I can consent to your union, and bring a curse on our whole race.’



## CHAPTER V.



### THE WEDDING.

rested her head on her mother's shoulder and sobbed convulsively, while Mrs. Bunnie patted her mournfully and wept sympa-

thising tears. Huz stood in a tragic attitude, looking the picture of black despair ; Mr. Bunnie sniffed and snorted, and tried to look stern, but every now and then had to pass his paw furtively across his eyes, for the misery he was obliged to cause the young people touched his kind heart deeply. When—

' A sound of silver wings,  
A music in the air,

A softer murmur in the breeze,  
A whispering among the trees,  
Told of a presence fair ;  
Swiftly flying,  
Pain descrying,  
Tender, true, and brave of heart,  
With endeavour,  
Seeking ever  
Sweetest comfort to impart'—

And Heartsease alighted amidst the sorrow-stricken group.

'I have come,' she said, in her soft winning voice, after greeting them all kindly, 'to ask if you have recovered the scare of last night, when Jim Sykes so rudely broke up our party?'

'Yes, it *was* a scramble,' said Mr. Bunnie, endeavouring to look as if his nose was not red and his eyes full of water. 'How we did run! I don't think I ever went so fast in my life since I beat "Towzer," Farmer Nokes's greyhound, in the two-acre field—but I think I have told you that story before; let me see, it was in the year——'

'My dear friends, do not try to talk to me like that,' said Heartsease, quietly. 'You are seeking to hide something from me; here is poor Flossy a perfect Niobe of tears, and Huz looks as if he was going mad, like his cousins the Hares in March. You know I love you all—will you not tell me your trouble, and let me try to help you?'

Wouldn't they? Of course they would, for were they not all longing to confide their sorrows to that gentle sympathising heart that was ever ready to succour the afflicted?

It was not long before Heartsease had heard the whole story ; and it was like a gleam of sunlight when they saw the bright smile that illuminated her face, and hope—that blessed fountain, which is ever ready to spring bubbling freshly up in the most barren soil—began to revive, as they watched the calm serenity of her beautiful eyes.

‘ My poor friends,’ she said gently, after a moment’s pause, ‘ and so you have been very unhappy because my ancestress uttered that prediction ; but have you not heard that there is One without whose knowledge a sparrow cannot fall ? Do you not know that a time will come when even the wolf and the lamb shall feed together, and the lion shall eat straw, and dust shall be the serpent’s meat—they shall hurt no more ? Then why do you fear ?

‘ My ancestress may have spoken truly in foretelling that evil times would come upon you “ when Black mates White, and White mates Black ;” but do you think you can avert that evil by doing a wrong action ? Believe me, no ; it is a vain delusion, only worthy of the ignorant arrogance of man. Rather prepare to meet the evil, and, doing what is right, trust the future to Him whose mercy knoweth no bounds.

‘ My good Mr. Bunnie, if these two children love each other truly, it is well that they should be united ; and, if I may ask a favour for the sake of old friendship, it is that the wedding may take place this day, for I would like to be







Going to Fairyland.

present at it ; and I must tell you that to-night I am obliged to leave you for a little while, as I have been summoned to the Court of Titania, our Fairy Queen, and, when the moon rises, Snip-Snap is to convey me thither on the wings of his swallow-steed.'

Here Heartsease blushed a little, though why she should have done so I cannot tell, as I know her heart was too guileless to hide a second thought ; but, whatever may have been the cause, she looked wondrously beautiful as the tender pink mantled shyly in her fair cheeks, and a new light was born in her eyes, which the Rabbits had never seen there before.

Who could refuse a request from Heartsease ? Certainly not the Bunnies. Even Mr. Rat was heard to say, that if her nose were only a trifle longer, and her forehead a leetle more retreating, she would be irresistible ; and he would turn Conservative on the spot, and never gnaw the parson's hassock again, if so she willed it.

As for Huz and Flossy, they had no words to express their gratitude, and when Heartsease went on to tell them how she had arranged that they should pass their honeymoon in her beautiful abode under the oak, where they would be quite safe from interruption, as Nelly, the Squire's only daughter, never would allow a gun to be fired in the Home Park, joy reigned in the hearts of all.

Mrs. Bunnie trotted about, making the necessary prepara-

tions in a more delightful state of bustle than she had ever been before ; Mr. Bunnie strutted here and there, getting into everybody's way, talking complacently of settlements and important business, and looking every inch the father of a marriageable daughter ; while Floss and Huz—but it is best to leave them to their own sweet reflections.

Nor is it for my poor pen to describe how lovely the bride looked, and how gallantly the bridegroom bore himself, or to repeat the speeches at the wedding-breakfast, where Professor Rabbi grew quite poetic, and likened the symmetry of the bride's beautiful figure to the perfect lines of a toadstool of the earliest period ; and Mr. Coniah ap Lloyd, on returning thanks for the bridesmaids, was understood to express a wish that he was a Turkish Rabbit, and could lead them all to the hymeneal altar himself, when, getting rather confused, he was promptly coughed down, and everybody ran off to throw rice after the retreating couple.

Then there was the kissing, and the laughing, and the crying ; and presently some bright genius started the idea that they should have a dance on the lawn, and away they all went, flying round and round like mad—

Whirling,  
Twirling,  
Dancing,  
Prancing,  
Every fall  
The fun enhancing—

right over the head of Mr. Rat, who had retired to his hole to relieve his feelings by writing a stinging article against marriages in general, and young ladies in particular ; and was so put out at the noise, that he found it necessary to gnaw his way through the upper leather of a particularly tough old boot, which had once belonged to a nobleman, before he could recover his equanimity.



## CHAPTER VI.



### THE ATTACK.

GOOD-MORNING,  
Nokes,' said a  
kindly voice;  
'where are you  
going so early with  
your gun?'

'Jim and me be  
going up tu the War-  
ren, sir, tu sheut  
down they Rabbits.'

'But what will the Squire say? I thought he didn't like  
your shooting the Rabbits?'

'That may be, sir; but I hears they Parliament-folk up tu  
London ha' given we the right to sheut Hares and Rabbits  
like varmin, and I means to have my rights.'

‘But I suppose you knew the Warren was on your farm when you took it, and understood that the Squire wished to reserve the right of shooting? He hasn’t let the Rabbits increase since then, has he?’

‘No, sir; I can’t exactly say as he has.’

‘Well, don’t you think that the beasts of the field should be allowed some little share in the fruits of the earth as well as ourselves?’

‘Maybe, sir, yeu be a scholard with book-larning, and it bain’t for such as I to argufy with yeu; but what I says is, let they as likes the Rabbits keep ’em; I doan’t like ’em, and the sooner I can get rid of ’em off my farm the better I’ll be pleased.’

‘Well, Nokes, I can’t wish you good sport on such a cruel errand.’

And the parson walked away meditating.

‘I wonder where Jim be got tu with them ferrets,’ soliloquised Nokes, as he sat on the bank; ‘I had best go and see.’

A wounded Partridge, which lay concealed in the hedge, had heard this conversation, and as soon as the farmer with his gun was safe out of sight, she rose from her lurking-place and flew swiftly towards the Warren.

‘I feel very sad this morning,’ said Mrs. Bunnie to her husband, as she sat gently smoothing her soft hair in the

shadow of a clump of fern. 'I wish our Heartsease was back; her words always bring me such comfort, and to-day I have a presentiment of evil which I cannot shake off.'

'That's very foolish of you, my dear,' replied Mr. Bunnie, stroking his nose; 'why, only last night, we heard from Flo how she and Huz were enjoying their honey-spoon,' and her worthy spouse chuckled heartily at his little joke.

Just then a whirr of wings was heard, and a Partridge alighted before them.

'I am come,' she said, 'to warn two of your family, called Floss and Huz, who were once kind to me, that a great danger hangs over them; Farmer Nokes and Jim Sykes are going to shoot the Warren this morning.'

Mr. and Mrs. Bunnie exchanged glances.

'If you know them,' said the Partridge, earnestly, 'I beg you to warn them to escape, for I must not tarry here.'

'How true were the words of Heartsease!' cried Mrs. Bunnie, as she watched the retreating bird; 'if we had opposed the union of our children they would have been here now, exposed to this danger.'

'Hark!' said Mr. Bunnie, as a loud report rang through the wood, followed by a scream of pain; and they retreated hastily to the farthest recess of the Warren.

Again the report rang sharp and clear through the morning air, and was reverberated from tor to tor till it lost itself in

the windings of the glen, striking terror into the breasts of all.

Bang, bang, bang, bang, now followed in rapid succession, and a panting Rabbit, with her fur all torn and blood-stained, rushed into their hiding-place.

‘Four great flaming barrels all emptied at poor me!’ she sobbed, as soon as she had recovered her breath. ‘Oh, my poor heart, how it beats! I never was so frightened in my life!’

Once more the guns were heard, this time followed by the sharp barking of a terrier.

‘That is Jim Sykes’s dog Grab,’ whispered Mr. Bunnie nervously; ‘keep close, my dear. How glad I am Floss and Huz are in safety.’

‘But they were to return to-day,’ said his wife; ‘suppose they should be on their way here now!’

‘Hush! what is that?’

A strange and disagreeable odour began to steal through the passages of the Warren.

‘It is a Ferret,’ cried Mr. Bunnie, trembling. ‘Oh, my darling, we are lost! We must make for the open, and then we shall be shot down ruthlessly.’

‘But if we could only warn Floss and Huz,’ said the mother, still thinking of her child, ‘I could die content.’

‘Fear not!’ replied her husband bravely; ‘you run for the



shelter of the Gorse by the Moor-gate, and I will make for the Park fence across the open. We may yet be in time ; perhaps our going in different directions will distract their fire and facilitate our escape.'

At this moment the red eyes of the ferret were seen gleaming fiercely at the farther end of the passage, and they knew that there was not a moment to spare, so, with a last fond embrace, they parted and dashed into daylight.

Crack—bang ! went both barrels of a gun, and poor gentle Mrs. Bunnie rolled gasping in the dust, the life-blood welling fast from her faithful heart.

Meanwhile Mr. Bunnie, unconscious of his bereavement, had taken the opposite direction, and was gallantly striving to reach the Park paling. His way was more exposed than that which he had advised his wife to take, for he had to cross some fifty yards of open sward—the same lawn on which they had danced so merrily the night of the wedding. But Farmer Nokes's attention had been first attracted to Mrs. Bunnie, and he did not see him.

Not so, however, with Jim Sykes ; he was warily watching for a rabbit-back, and just as poor Mr. Bunnie was on the point of reaching the fence, he levelled his deadly weapon and fired ; the shot whistled round him, cutting up the grass in all directions, but he was still unhurt, when, quick as light, Jim discharged the second barrel, and a shower of lead



The Ferret.

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lacerated the poor rabbit's side ; paternal love, however, was stronger than pain, and with a desperate effort he dashed through the fence, and sank mortally wounded on the path beyond.

‘He’s hit!’ shouted Jim, rushing after him ; but Farmer Nokes, who had turned round, cried out :

‘Hold hard there, Jim, doan’t ee go for to cross that fence—who knows but the keepers may be watchin’?’

And Jim had reluctantly to return.



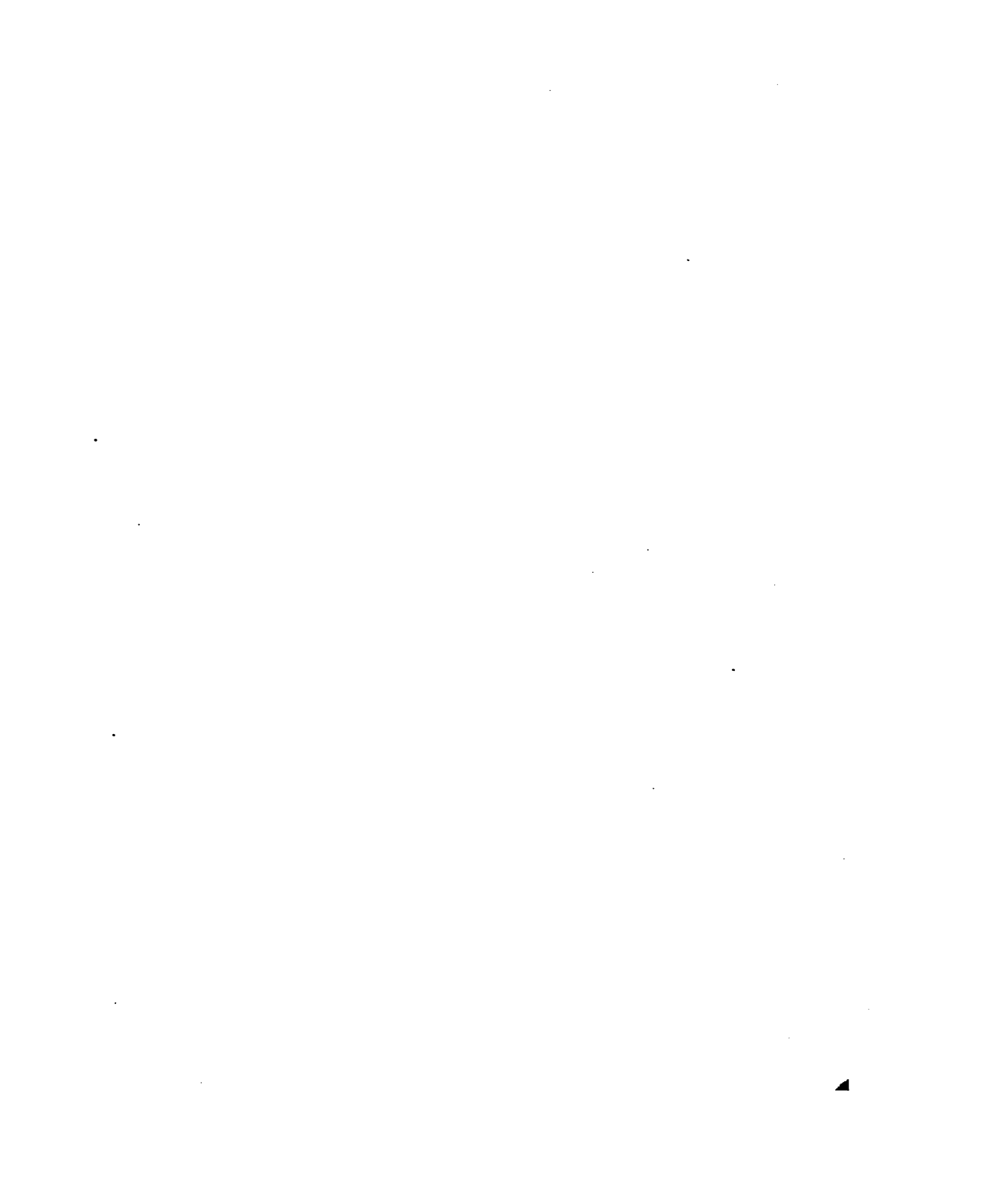
## CHAPTER VII.



### AFTER THE HONEYMOON.

was the morning after the attack on the Warren, and Floss and Huz had spent four days of perfect happiness among the beautiful flowers and ferns that surrounded the home of their fairy benefactress; indeed, the time had

flown so swiftly that they had tarried a day longer than had at first been intended—for Rabbits' honeymoons, like their lives, are short—and now they were preparing to return to the Burrow, which Mr. Bunnie had given them for a country residence, and were looking forward to surprising the home-circle at their morning meal, and pleasantly anticipating all the merry shouts of welcome that would greet their arrival from the lips of those they loved.





The Woodland Path.

The sun was rising gloriously in the east ; the merry lark was soaring high in the blue sky overhead, carolling his blithesome morning hymn ; the diamond dewdrops sparkled brightly on every fern and flower and mazy blade of grass, and the air was sweet with the bracing fragrance of the early morn.

The two Rabbits hopped gaily along the wooded glades full of the most delightful anticipations, till they reached the park fence which separated them from Dingle Farm. In another five minutes Floss would be in her fond mother's arms, and, unconsciously hastening their steps, they turned the corner of the path—and then all their happiness was scattered to the winds, for right before them, cold and silent in the awful stillness of death, lay the well-known form of poor Mr. Bunnie, with his paws still extended as he had fallen in his last gallant effort to come to their succour.

How little they recked now of the sunshine and the song of birds ! A great darkness seemed to have come over the scene, and Floss knelt by her father's side in speechless grief.

Hardly knowing how to comfort his wife in her first great sorrow, Huz offered to go to the Warren for assistance, and, promising to be back in a few minutes, ran swiftly down the path.

The sun climbed higher and higher in the heavens, the



mists rose curling in white wreaths of vapour from the river, hour after hour chimed from the distant church, but he did not return, and still Flossy sat mourning by her father's side.

At last, frightened by the silence and his long absence, she crept timidly down the path he had followed, and had not proceeded more than a hundred yards before she saw her husband sitting in the hedge looking at her, but with *such* a strange expression in his eyes. She called to him, but he neither moved nor spoke, though she could tell by the movement of his ears that he had heard. Now fairly terrified, she ran up to where he sat, and soon discovered the cause of his strange behaviour.

A fine running noose of copper wire, firmly attached to a short stake, had been placed so as exactly to fit a hole in the hedge, through which the Rabbits were in the habit of passing; it was so fine, and so artfully concealed by leaves, that no one in a hurry would notice it—and Rabbits are generally in a great hurry.

Poor Huz, returning from the deserted Warren with his heart full of care, had run his head through this noose, and the more he struggled to push forward, the tighter it closed round his neck, till at length he could hardly breathe, and was unable to utter even a cry to warn his wife of his danger.

Floss tried with all her feeble strength to loosen the

poacher's cruel snare, but it had got twisted so tight that her efforts were in vain, though she managed to ease it sufficiently to allow Huz to breathe freely.

'I will run to the Warren,' she said, 'and get assistance from mother.'

'Alas!' replied Huz, 'you will find no one there; it has been attacked quite lately, and even now the smell of the ferrets linger in its passages, and all our people are either killed or fled. No, darling; save yourself, and leave me here till Jim Sykes comes to find me.'

'How cruel you are!' cried Floss, bursting into tears. 'Oh, if our Heartsease were only back, she would advise us! Ah! now I remember she told us once that Nelly, the Squire's daughter, would never allow any creature to be killed in the Park. Yes, I will go myself to seek her, and see if she will not help us.'

'But think of the danger, darling,' said her husband. 'You will never be able to reach the house, which is watched by fierce dogs. No, no; better leave me where I am; I can but die, and we shall meet again in that happy land which Heartsease told us of.'

'So can I but die,' said the wife; 'I know I am only a poor timid little rabbit, but I can be brave for the sake of those I love—I feel I can!' and, kissing him fondly, she began to ascend the path that led to the house.

It was the same path that she had traversed the night that Huz had first told her of his love, but how different were her feelings then! Even when they were returning wet and frightened by the storm, she was far happier than now, when she felt that, if she had not already been a white Rabbit, she must have turned grey with the anxiety of the last few hours.

And Huz sat and watched her form retreating in the distance, knowing that at any moment Jim Sykes might come to seek his victim.



## CHAPTER VIII.

### HEARTSEASE IN FAIRY- LAND.



where was Heartsease?

She was sitting at the feet of the Fairy Queen on the banks of a glassy lake, of such a deep, transparent blue that the most lustrous sapphire would have looked dull beside it. All around grew wonderful flowering

trees, with twisted roots like polished coral, which rose out of the smooth water in a thousand fantastic shapes, forming long cool vaulted naves of the most beautiful Gothic tracery, under which the fairies glided about in their little skiffs made of

magnolia leaves. Humming-birds, with flaming breasts of every hue, darted here and there among the branches overhead, filling the air with soft music ; while great blue butterflies poised like living turquoises on the delicate petals of the scented tropical flowers which waved softly to and fro in the balmy breeze that never knew the chill of winter.

She was in that lovely realm of Fairyland which we are sometimes permitted to visit in our childish dreams, though less frequently as we grow older and take a deeper interest in the stern routine of worldly pursuits.

For one week in each year the little wood-fairy had to come to the court of her sovereign, and tell her of all she had been doing to comfort and assist her friends, the animals in Heatherbell Park ; for the Queen liked to know everything about everybody, and was very fond of a long chat with her favourite.

‘ And do you never feel that you would like some one to help you in all your duties ? ’ asked Titania, gently stroking the silken tresses of the little fairy ; ‘ do you never feel lonely in your home in the old oak ? ’

‘ I have been very happy among my birds and butterflies,’ said Heartsease, shyly. ‘ You don’t know how good they all are, and how little trouble they give me. It is quite a pleasure to teach them.’

‘ But have you never thought of *anyone* who could assist

you with his counsel and strength, when you are in difficulty ?' persisted the Queen, gently raising the blushing face between her hands, and trying to look into the tender averted eyes, to which the unbidden tears were quickly springing. 'Do you know, I had an object in sending for you this time ; there is one of my subjects who was once a Gnome but is now an Elf, in whom I take great interest, and, poor fellow ! he is very unhappy ; for he has been striving *so* hard to be good of late, and he thinks that if you would only consent to assist him, he might become still more worthy of the good counsel you once gave him ; but you must let him tell you his trouble himself.'

And, releasing herself from the girl's embrace, she flew swiftly away, leaving her alone.

Not for long, however ; there was the flutter of a pair of radiant wings above, and in another moment Snip-Snap knelt beside her with love in his eyes and fear in his heart : he did not venture to speak, but even as he gazed upon her Hearts-ease's beautiful head sank lower and lower till her bright curls rested lightly on his shoulder, and Snip-Snap knew that his great love had won its reward.

So they too stood,  
Their souls together bound  
In that great myst'ry  
Which is called love.

Each in the other  
New perfection found,  
Not that they deemed the more  
Of their own worth,  
But that new comprehension  
Rose to birth  
Of their own hearts,  
Whereby, both loving,  
They more fully knew  
How deep true love can be,  
How fond, how true.

They were married in that beautiful realm of Fairyland, and Titania, who took quite a mortal interest in their wedding, showered fairy gifts upon them, and all the birds burst into song, and all the flowers opened their sweetest buds, as the bridegroom sprang lightly on his swallow steed, and, placing his beautiful bride before him, flew through the starry sky towards their home in Heatherbell Park.



## CHAPTER IX.

### FLOSSY'S EXPEDITION.



Meanwhile poor Flossy was running as fast as her legs could carry her to Heatherbell House. She had got through the wood in safety, and was crossing the road which led to the lodge gates, when some children, who were blackberry - hunting, caught sight of her, and a little urchin of nine set up a whoop tally-ho! that sent her heart into her mouth, and nearly made her turn back again. The old woman who kept the lodge, however, came out and boxed the child's ears for making such a noise, which changed his shouts to a dismal howl, and gave Flossy an opportunity of escaping unseen



into the shelter of the bracken that grew beside the carriage drive.

It was a very long drive, bordered on either side by stately elm trees that arched gracefully overhead ; and, when Flossy came to the end of it and saw the house, eleven was already ringing from the grey, weather-beaten tower of the little church in the park.

A great difficulty now presented itself. How was she to get access to Nelly ? The hall-door stood hospitably open, with this kindly motto carved on the massive lintel :

‘ Beneath old Heatherbell’s wide open gate,  
None comes too early or departs too late.’

But a huge English mastiff lay dozing, with his nose between his paws, on the rug, and Flossy did not know how to get past him.

There was another gate, leading into the stable-yard, which was at the back of the house, and, as all seemed quiet there, she crept cautiously towards it, and, crossing the threshold, peeped into a neat wooden box painted bright green, which stood beside it.

Hardly had she done so, when there was a dreadful rattle of iron, and a huge Newfoundland dog sprang out, straining at his chain, with his mouth wide open, as if about to gobble her up. Flossy caught a glimpse of two gleaming rows of teeth, and tumbled over backwards, nearly dead with fright.

Luckily, the dog's chain prevented him from reaching her, but a couple of grooms now looked out of the stable-door to see what was the matter, and, no sooner did they espy her, than one hurled a pitchfork-handle after her, while the other ran to loosen the dog.

So Flossy fled for her life, wondering why everybody seemed to be the enemy of a poor little Rabbit who wished to harm no one.

She had made for the nearest way out of the yard, and presently found herself in a beautiful garden, with a lawn of smooth-shaven grass and beds of bright-coloured flowers bigger than any she had ever seen before. Sitting on the lawn, in the shade of an acacia, with her hat lying beside her, was a young girl reading; she looked so fair and pretty, that Floss could not help comparing her to Heartsease, and felt that this must be Nelly, as indeed it was. The gentle expression of her face gladdened the poor little Rabbit's heart, for it was kind and good; but the young lady remained so absorbed in her book, that Flossy did not know how to attract her attention, and was still hesitating, when the great Newfoundland came tearing across the lawn towards her. Terror now banished all shyness, and she fairly leaped into Nelly's arms.

'Oh, what a beautiful rabbit! You pretty dear! Down, Ponto! Back, sir; go back to your house, you bad dog.

What do you mean by chasing this sweet darling? Here, Kennedy, chain up Ponto at once.'

And the abashed monster was led off, crestfallen, by the groom.

'If I could only speak in the same quiet tone of authority, I wonder if *I* should be obeyed like that?' sighed Flossy.

'You pretty, sweet Bunny! And was it very much frightened? Come, zen, it must tell me *all* about it.' And the girl began fondling the Rabbit in her arms.

Until now, it had never occurred to Flossy to think how she was to make herself understood; her heart was full of one great desire, and yet she had no means of expressing it.

We should be very gentle and kind to dumb animals, when we reflect that few days, perhaps few hours, pass without many of them being in the position of poor Flossy—longing to express some sorrow or want, and yet unable to make themselves understood, unless we try to help them.

It was in vain that Flossy held up her paws and looked beseechingly at Nelly; the young girl only fondled her the more, and then, thinking she might be hungry, ran off and brought her a saucer full of the most beautiful fresh milk and bread, which Flossy could not touch, for was she not thinking all the time how Jim Sykes might even then be on his way to kill Huz!

Great tears filled her eyes as she realised her inability to



Floss and Nelly.



make Nelly understand ; but at last she managed to escape from her arms, and, running a little way across the lawn, stopped and looked back at her. Nelly followed, while she ran on again, and the young girl's quick comprehension now caught her meaning, for, to Flossy's intense delight, she walked after her without attempting to take her up. But this joy was short-lived. A cheery voice was heard calling, 'Nell, Nelly dear, come here, I want you ;' and with a falsetto, 'Yes, father, I'm coming,' Nelly sped back like the wind towards the house.

Poor Flossy ! She felt very wretched when she saw all her hopes thus vanish in a moment.

Nelly, however, was too kind-hearted to leave her little friend long in suspense, and soon returned to the lawn accompanied by Squire Longacre, whose bluff voice and heavy footsteps dreadfully alarmed Flossy. He seemed very much amused at Nelly's whim of following her, but was too fond of his only child to refuse to gratify any wish that she had at heart, and the two walked briskly after their Rabbit guide towards the scene of Huz's captivity. No sooner had they reached the path leading through the wood, than the Squire's quick eye caught sight of poor Mr. Bunnie lying cold and stiff among the weeds, and his honest face flushed with anger as he lifted him up.

'This is *too* bad !' he exclaimed. 'Not only does that

fellow Nokes take it into his dunder-head that Parliament has set him free from all past agreements, and shoot my rabbits without law or license, but here he comes and poaches in my own park! That, at least, I will *not* stand. Come along,



Nelly; your little friend has shown you what she wanted, and you may bring her back to the house as a pet, if you like. I must go and see the bailiff.'

Nelly now caught Flossy up, and began carrying her towards the house in her arms. Would she *never* be able to make herself understood, thought

the faithful little wife, in despair, with her eyes straining in the direction of the spot where Huz lay captive; then, with a desperate effort, she loosed herself from Nelly's embrace, and ran towards the hedge.

'You see, she prefers her freedom,' said the Squire; 'come along, child.'

But finding they did not follow, Floss came back and began pulling at Nelly's skirts with her teeth.

'Oh, papa, she has something more to show us,' said Nelly, pleadingly. 'Do come a little farther.'

'No, dear ; I must go and see about this business.'

'But look how the poor little thing is crying. Only come a little way, just to please me. Ah, *do* now !'

The 'Ah, do now !' reminded the Squire of the sweet Irish wife he had lost, and he could resist no longer, so, with a muttered 'You little tyrant !—you always manage to get your own way,' he followed her down the path.





## CHAPTER X.

ENDS THE STORY.



It was a very critical moment for Huz. Two long hours had passed, and still there was no sign of Flossy's return, while a hundred fearful thoughts as to what might have befallen his darling on her dangerous expe-

dition troubled the poor captive's mind.

Presently a dark shadow was cast across the hedge, and, looking up, he beheld the burly form of Jim Sykes looming above him, with a short heavy stick in his uplifted hand, ready to knock him on the head. Jim caught firm hold of the rabbit's back and gave the stick a flourish, while the sunny

woodland landscape seemed to swim round and round before poor Huz's eyes.

Then there was a sound of voices, and two little fair hands were stretched protectingly above his head, while the poacher was hurled backwards by some unseen power into the ditch, where he sat among the brambles and nettles, gazing blankly up at the angry face of the Squire, who was sternly addressing him.

‘So it is you, Jim Sykes, who poach my woods, is it?’ he said, as he shook the ruffian by the collar. ‘I have long suspected this, but now I have caught you in the act, and, as I am a magistrate, you shall repent it. Here, Rodger,’ to a labourer who was passing through a neighbouring field, ‘take this fellow up to the house, and see that he does not escape.’

Meanwhile, Nelly had very gently loosened the wire from Huz's neck, and was softly stroking his silky ears, while Floss nestled up beside her and dumbly strove to express her gratitude.

Two months have passed. It is one of those bright sunny winter mornings, with an elastic freshness in the air, and a cheery sparkle of hoar-frost on the hedgerows, that we are often blessed with in dear old England towards the end of the year. The berries clustering on the holly-trees are grow-

ing redder and redder, to be ready for Christmas, as Mr. Cheshire Cat punningly remarks ; and, with a warm fur cape over her shoulders, thick boots on her tiny feet, and cheeks almost as rosy as the berries, Nelly is taking a run round the garden, while behind her scamper Floss and Huz, delighted to get out.

The two Bunnies have come to the conclusion that the life of a wild Rabbit is not a happy one in these hard times, and have placed themselves under the protection of little Nelly, who has had a beautiful warm hutch built for them in her own garden, and never fails to visit it every day. If they ever regret for a moment their old free life at the Warren, the thought is banished at once when they think of their present security and the kindness of their gentle mistress.

As they cross the carriage-drive, a man who is raking the gravel touches his hat to Nelly. It is their old enemy Jim Sykes the poacher ; but Floss and Huz no longer regard him with terror, for the good-natured Squire, instead of sending him to prison, has given him a chance to reform, and made him an under-gardener. So, in future, Jim will have to spend his time in growing lettuce-leaves for Nelly to feed her Rabbits on, instead of setting snares to kill them.

Presently the merry trio reach the foot of Heartease's oak, and a bright smile lights up Nelly's pretty face, for she

knows that the fairy will be at home to receive her. They have become great friends, these two gentle natures, and hardly a day passes that Nelly does not visit the old oak with Floss and Huz for companions; while Heartsease, now the happiest of brides, delights in seeing them and telling them beautiful stories.

To-day the little fairy looks rather grave, for Snip-Snap has just told her that he has remarked a grey-haired old gentleman, with keen restless eyes, looking *very* thoughtfully at their oak as he walked through the wood; and Mr. Cheshire Cat, who lives at a neighbouring great house, says that there is a woodman's axe among his luggage, and he thinks his name is Weg, for he saw it written on his portmanteau. On hearing which Mr. Weasel was observed to wink twice, and put his finger to his nose in a very significant manner.

Nelly, however, hastens to assure her fairy hostess that she believes Mr. Weg means well, and that at any rate she need not be alarmed, for she knows that her father will never consent to an ancient oak of such goodly growth being levelled in *his* park, even though the Czar of all the Russias were to ask him.

So Heartsease smiles again, and tells them of the wonderful dreams she is sending to the flowers, which have gone to rest during the long winter months, like sleeping

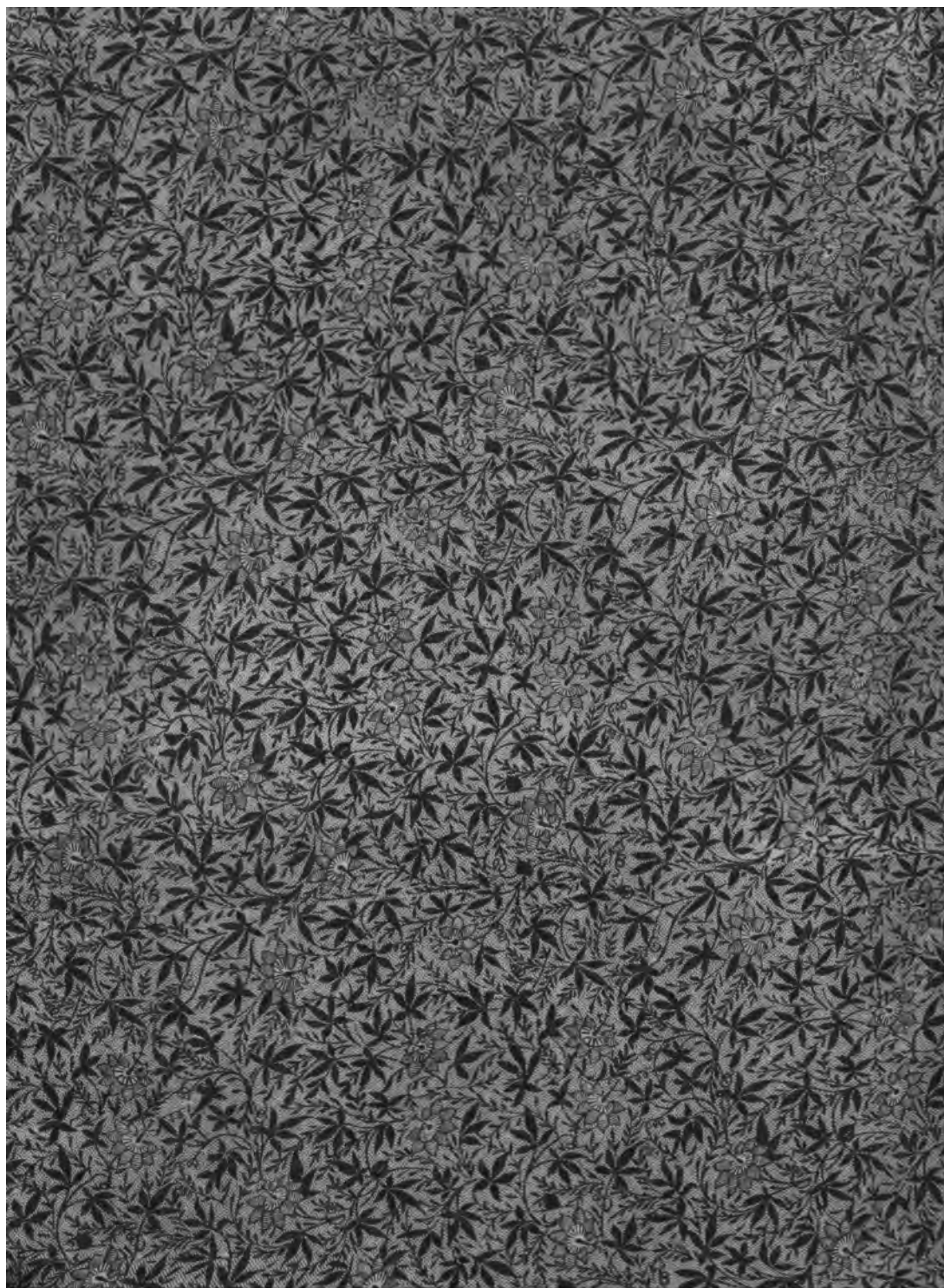
beauties waiting till the warm kiss of the spring sunshine shall awaken them, and they are as happy as possible.

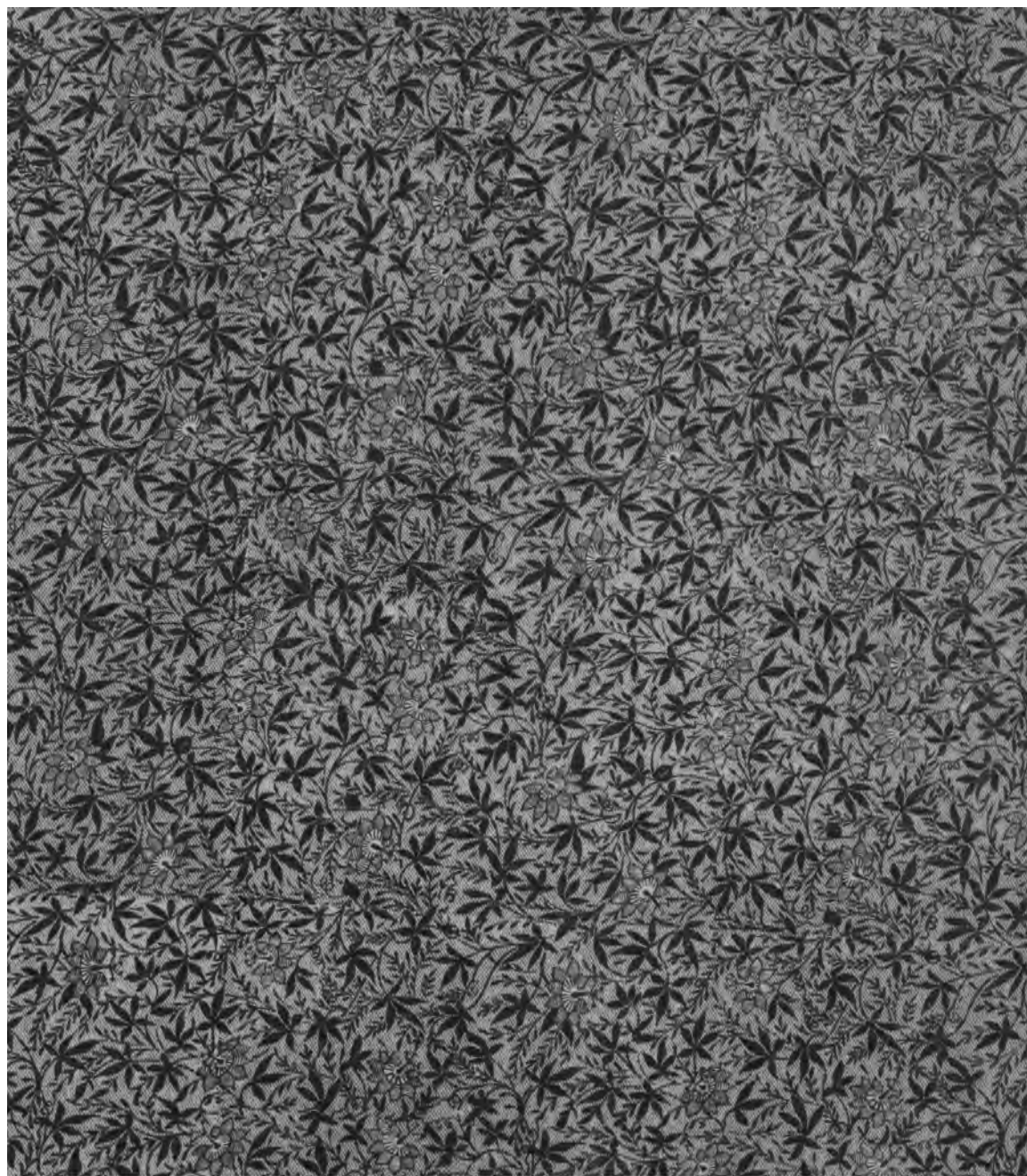
I hope, dear reader, you may always be the same.



Peace and goodwill, friends true and tried,  
Be with you all this Christmastide ;  
Happy each home, happy each one—  
Farewell, kind reader ; my story's done.









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